


Country of the Week: Madagascar

Would you believe Madagascar used to be part of India?

The two landmasses were conjoined until about 100 million years ago, when India split off and slowly drifted north to its current position. That means the plants and animals on Madagascar, the fourth-largest island in the world, have evolved in isolation for millions of years. These days, over 90% of the island's wildlife is found nowhere else on Earth!

The Republic of Madagascar is home to more than just unique species of plants and animals. It is also home to unique, successful, and inspiring young people just like you! That's why we've named Madagascar the YALI Network #CountryoftheWeek.


Read on to learn more about the impact Malagasy members have been having in their communities!

Our first featured member, Lova Rakotoarisoa, is a [Mandela Washington Fellowship](#) alumna  from Toamasina. She is "passionate about local and global initiatives aimed at transforming social issues and promoting human rights, democracy, and good governance."

Lova explains, "My experience with the YALI Network and the Mandela Washington Fellowship program exposed me to a practical understanding of good governance and its link to sustainable development. Throughout various [YALI Network Online Courses](#) and the many enriching exchanges during the MWF program in the United States, I learned effective ways to promote good governance within public administration processes."

Lova believes ineffective governance is the root of many of Madagascar's problems. To address the issue, she organizes trainings targeting public officials across the island, such as mayors and council members. These emphasize the importance of good governance to sustainable development and cover topics like accountability, transparency, and responsiveness. Participants then transform their ideas into action plans.

"The project is going well so far," Lova says. "By the end of 2017, I hope to secure enough resources to organize a regional monitoring and evaluation workshop and best practices open day with representatives from those municipalities."


Our next featured member, Vony Randrianonenana, has been part of the YALI Network since 2014 and was selected for a [YALI Regional Leadership Center](#) online program on civic leadership last year. 

In December, Vony decided to apply her civic leadership skills to create her own nonprofit association, "Clair de Lune Madagascar," or "Moonlight of Madagascar." "Our mission," she says, "is to provide assistance to the most vulnerable families... to bring positive change to our community."

The organization's first project was an event called "Christmas Heart," which included charitable donations to 25 women and 200 children in rural areas. "We got support from companies, individuals, organizations, and corporations," Vony says.

"Our second project was to support an orphanage in Antananarivo, to start [their year off] full of joy

and promises,” she says. Their next project will “offer a range of activities, training programs, and assistance to women most in need.” Trainings will include basic vocational and literacy skills; Vony hopes to help these women “be financially independent, to create lasting employment, to feed their families, and especially to encourage them to send their children to school.”

Our last featured Malagasy member this week, Irina Ramalanjaona, also comes from  Antananarivo. Like Vony, she participated in a [YALI Regional Leadership Center](#) program last summer.

After the program, as her two-year term volunteering at Women in Motorsports Madagascar was coming to an end, Irina and her colleagues decided to start an organization of their own. The organization, “We Move Madagascar,” aims “to address girls’ and women’s issues in road safety, business and entrepreneurship, youth empowerment, and cultural matters.”

“Our latest action,” Irina says, was at a social center that takes in girls who face issues “such as rape, abuse, parental abandonment, or legal problems which placed them on trial.” According to Irina, “We mentor them from the roots... We assist in their school duties and give additional support for language classes, for example.”

Irina also led a session to teach the girls how to decorate the center with recycled materials. “The objective was to teach them the importance of aesthetics and details, which they will be introduced to in the professional world,” Irina says. “The session was appreciated by both the girls and the staff,” she says, and several more sessions with different aims are planned for this year.

[U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit to Shine Light on Youth](#)

The heads of 50 African nations will gather in Washington August 4-6 at the invitation of President Obama for an unprecedented three-day summit.

With the theme “Investing in the Next Generation,” the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit will build on Obama’s 2013 trip to Africa and highlight the U.S. commitment to Africa’s people, security and democratic development. With a focus on deepening the U.S.-Africa partnership, the discussions will look for ways the United States and Africa can:

- Expand cooperation on peace and regional security.
- Promote inclusive and sustainable development.
- Bolster trade and investment.
- Create an enabling environment for the next generation of Africans.

The theme reflects the ambition the United States shares with African people and governments to prepare their nations for future generations by making concrete gains in good governance, peace

and security, and economic growth.

A new center of global growth, Africa is creating more opportunities than before for its people. Today's challenge is to ensure these gains expand and benefit all Africans, which will create new markets and more stable democratic governments.

Throughout the summit, African leaders will have opportunities to interact with President Obama, Cabinet heads, members of the U.S. Congress, U.S. and African business executives and a few Washington Fellows.

The first summit session on investing in Africa's future will center on inclusive and sustainable development, economic growth and trade and investment. That will be followed by a summit session on long-term solutions to regional conflicts, peacekeeping strategies and combatting transnational threats. The third summit session will focus on enhancing governance to deliver public services; attracting increased domestic and foreign investment; managing transnational threats; and stemming the flow of illicit finance.

The summit will feature six signature events focused on issues such as [civil society](#), [women's empowerment](#), [food security](#), [global health](#), [wildlife trafficking](#), and the contributions of faith communities. Each signature event will convene U.S. and African leaders from government, civil society and the private sector.

U.S. Trade Representative Michael Froman will host the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) ministerial at the World Bank. In this session, African and U.S. trade officials will discuss the future of AGOA and U.S. plans to pursue renewal of AGOA legislation.

The U.S. Department of Commerce and Bloomberg Philanthropies will co-host the first U.S.-Africa Business Forum to focus on strengthening trade and financial ties between the United States and Africa. The forum will highlight U.S. private sector engagement in Africa in the areas of finance and capital investment; infrastructure; power and energy; agriculture; consumer goods; and information and communication technology. President Obama, Secretary of Commerce Penny Pritzker and former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg will participate.

African leaders will also be welcomed at a reception hosted by the Senate Foreign Relations and House Foreign Affairs committees. President Obama and first lady Michelle Obama also will welcome the leaders for a dinner at the White House.

The summit reflects a shared commitment to the dignity, well-being and freedom of all people. Africa's success is good for Africa and good for the United States.

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